



# Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)

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## What is PrEP

PrEP stands for Pre Exposure Prophylaxis for HIV. It involves having anti-HIV drugs in your body **before** you are exposed to HIV in order to prevent infection. This is usually with a tablet containing tenofovir disoproxil fumerate and emtricitabine. As of May 2023, another type of PrEP is available on the NHS, which is a tablet containing tenofovir alafenamide and emtricitabine. This is available to people who have problems with their bones or kidneys, who will be reviewed in a referral clinic for eligibility. There are other types of PrEP available in some countries (long-acting injections), but these are not currently available on the NHS.

## Who should consider taking PrEP

PrEP is likely to be of benefit to people who are at higher risk of HIV infection, such as:

- People with partners from parts of the world where the rate of HIV is much higher
- People with a partner living with HIV who does not have an undetectable viral load
- Gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men
- Trans men and women

### And

- People who do not always use condoms for sex

There are situations where PrEP may be particularly advised, such as in:

- People who have used PEP following sexual risk
- Gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men who have had a recent sexually transmitted infection (particularly in the rectum/anus)
- People who use Chemsex drugs

## Who would not be recommended to take PrEP

People who are already living with HIV.

People who have a partner living with HIV that is taking HIV treatment and is currently 'undetectable' and has been for at least the last six months, where that person is their only partner.

## Before you start PrEP – we can help

- Tell the clinic staff you are planning to take or are taking PrEP so they can give you the right advice, discuss how to take PrEP correctly and offer monitoring tests
- **Have an HIV test:** in addition to a finger prick test, you should have a '4th generation' or 'antigen/antibody' HIV blood test just before or on the day you start. This can be with one of the Umbrella home test kits
- **Get your kidneys checked:** one of the components of PrEP can affect your kidney function. This is uncommon but it is reassuring if your kidney function is normal before you start. To check this we do a kidney function blood test and a urine test for protein. We can do these in the clinic for you. If there are any abnormal results, we can advise what to do. We may advise more frequent blood tests if you are older, weigh less than 55kg or have kidney related problems
- All the tests can be done at any Umbrella clinic
- **Check your status for hepatitis B:** this checks for current hepatitis B infection, which is important to know before you take PrEP (if positive this must be discussed with a specialist doctor), and checks for immunity against hepatitis B. If you do not have immunity we can provide a vaccination course in clinic
- **Have a full screen for sexually transmitted infections (STIs)**

If you are eligible for this get vaccinated for HPV and Hepatitis A.

## To be safe

Do not start PrEP if you have a flu-like illness and until you have ruled out HIV infection. Flu symptoms can be a sign of very early HIV infection, so it is important you visit the clinic first. If you are just starting PrEP and have been at risk in the last 45 days it is safest to have another HIV blood test 45 days after starting PrEP, to be sure you were not exposed at that time.

## Already started PrEP? We can help

It is important you have a blood test for HIV as soon as possible and be up to date with your vaccinations, for the reasons described above.

## Every 3 months

- Have an HIV test/STI check, 'The HIV test must be with a laboratory blood test. You can usually do this with a home test kit
- You may need your kidneys checked: one of the components of PrEP can affect your kidney function. This may only be necessary once a year depending on your risk factors

## Please do:

- Talk to us about the risks you are taking and how you manage your PrEP around these risks. We can arrange extra support particularly with the use of Chems (sex under the influence of recreational drugs) or if you have other personal issues
- Tell us if your health has changed, or if you start new medications
- Still use condoms to reduce the risk of catching STIs such as syphilis and gonorrhoea

## How to take PrEP

PrEP can be taken as a daily tablet or 'on-demand'.

If you take your PrEP pill every day, this will provide protection for a risk at any time during the period that PrEP is taken. Ideally you should start 7 days before any risk. If in doubt; start with a double dose. If taken 7 out of 7 days then it is 99% or more effective

The 'on demand' method is **only advised where the risk is from anal sex**. 'On-demand' – means you take PrEP just before and after a risk. This is also referred to as 'event-based dosing' or EBD.

Holiday PrEP. If you are going on holiday and think you will be at risk start 7 days before and continue for a week after.

However you choose to take PrEP the most important thing is to take it reliably, start in good time and for as long as you may be having risky sex. Most people who have caught HIV despite using PrEP have done so because they stopped taking it too early or did not take it reliably enough.

## Daily PrEP

If you decide to take your PrEP every day:

## Do

- Try to take your PrEP pills at a regular time each day. Pick a time you are likely to remember; for example, you may want to link it to a routine task e.g. tooth brushing
- Think about using a monday-sunday pill box so you can see if you have forgotten one
- Try to avoid missing pills, but if you do miss one, or even two pills, it is still worth carrying on taking PrEP. There is still likely to be enough medication in your body to protect against HIV
- Come to the clinic if you have missed more pills and are worried about any risks taken during this period. You may be at higher risk if you have missed three or more tablets in the week before a risk
- If you miss more than a week of pills and know you are going to have a risk soon, take a double dose (two pills), and then carry on with the dosage as normal
- Come to the clinic as soon as possible if you had a break from PrEP and had any risks during this time, to discuss whether you need post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), if within 72 hours from the last risk; and to discuss the best timing for a follow-up HIV test and STI screen

## On-demand PrEP

If you are taking PrEP on-demand, think about trying to make sure that there is enough of the medicine in your body at the time you have sex. **Remember on-demand is only advised where the risk is from anal sex.**

## To do this:

- Take a double-dose 2–24 hours (ideally 24 hours) before you anticipate a risk. It's better to take a dose you don't need than miss the opportunity to start in good time
- Take the next dose ideally 24 hours after the double dose at a time you are likely to remember
- Carry on taking PrEP daily at your regular time whilst any risk continues and try not to miss any doses
- After the last risk, carry on taking PrEP every day at your regular time for another 48 hours, that is for at least two further doses after the last risk. Please see the graphics below for more information

The study evidence for 'on demand' PrEP is best for those taking PrEP most weeks. If you have not taken pills for some time it may take longer for the pills to build up in your body. In this case try and start as early as possible and not just 2 hours before, a week is ideal if you are starting after gap of more than 7 days.

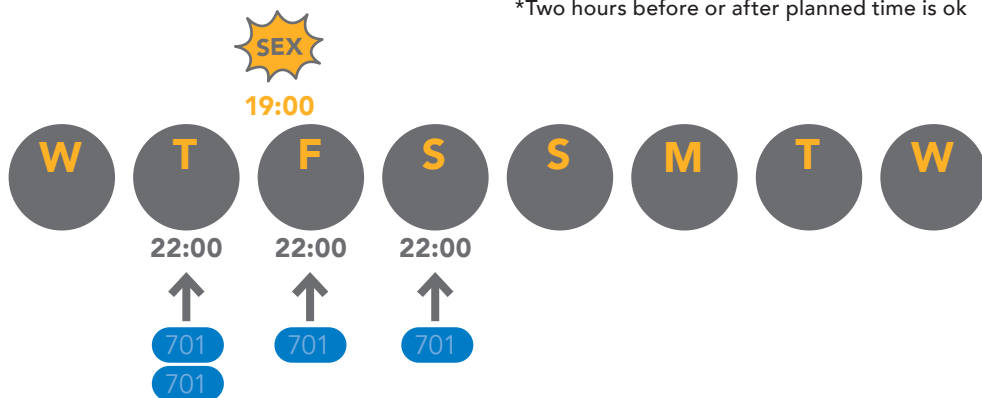
### Before sex

Two PrEP tablets at least two hours and ideally 24 hours before sex

### After sex

One PrEP tablet 24 hours\* after the first two. One PrEP tablet 48 hours\* after the first two = total of two tablets after sex

\*Two hours before or after planned time is ok



### Don'ts

- Try not to miss pills, or give up on PrEP just because you were late with the first dose. The drugs will still give you some protection so the sooner you take them the better. Start with the double dose (two tablets), and continue daily. Go to a clinic as soon as you can to discuss the need for PEP
- Don't take more than one double dose within seven days, i.e. if the next risk is less than seven days after the last dose, take just one tablet and continue as usual. Carrying on taking double doses after the first dose within a seven-day period isn't necessary and may do you harm. The graphics below give examples of how to take on-demand PrEP if you have sex several times, for example, over a weekend, or within a seven- day period

Examples of on-demand PrEP dosing for sex more than once within a week:

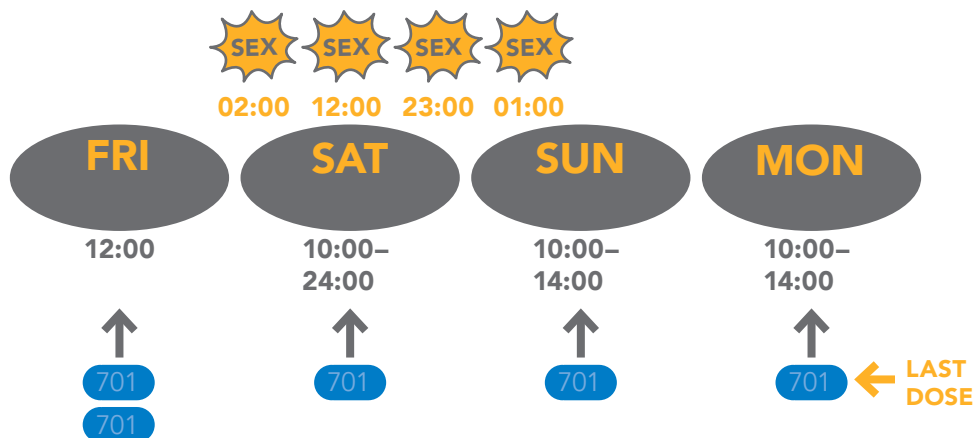
## Before sex

Two PrEP tablets at least two hours and not more than 24 hours before sex

## After sex

One PrEP tablet 24 hours\* after the first two. Take PrEP every 24 hours **until you have taken two doses after your last sex**

\*Two hours before or after planned time is ok



## First PrEP

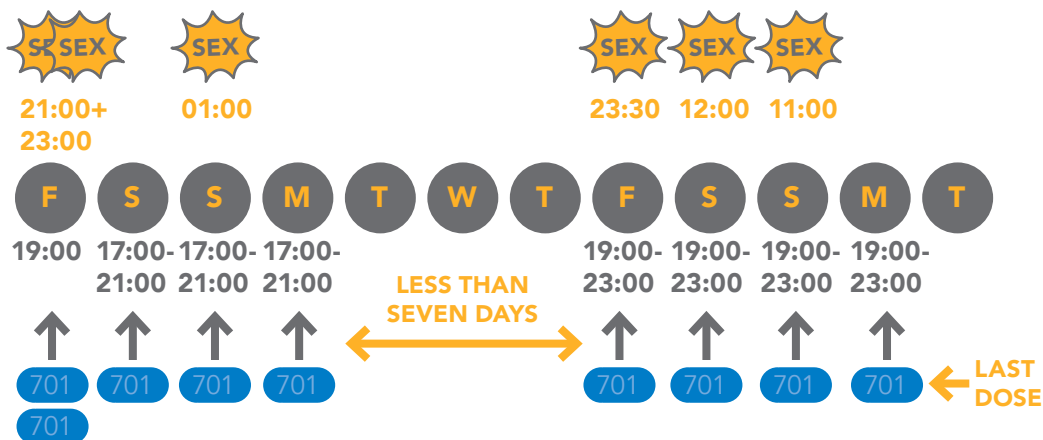
**Two** PrEP tablets at least two hours and ideally 24 hours before sex. One PrEP tablet every 24 hours\* until two tablets taken since last sex.

\*Two hours before or after planned time is ok

## Second PrEP

**One** PrEP tablet at least two hours and not more than 24 hours before sex. One PrEP tablet every 24 hours\* until two tablets taken since last sex.

\*Two hours before or after planned time is ok



- Come to the clinic as soon as possible if you have had a break from PrEP and need advice as to how to restart. If you have had high risk sex then ideally you need to come in within 72 hours

## Thinking about stopping PrEP

PrEP is an effective way of reducing your risk of HIV but you may choose to stop and restart PrEP, or change the way in which you take it, depending on your circumstances.

It is important that you continue the medication for at least two more doses after the last risk before stopping.

Talk to your clinic to get advice about which way of taking PrEP might be best for you and how to safely stop or restart when you need to.

## Resources

- <https://i-base.info/guides/prep> – Information about PrEP written by sexual health specialists and community advocates
- <https://prepster.info/>
- [www.iwantprepnnow.co.uk](http://www.iwantprepnnow.co.uk)

If you require this information in another format, such as a different language, large print, braille or audio version please ask a member of staff or email **[patientexperience@uhb.nhs.uk](mailto:patientexperience@uhb.nhs.uk)**.

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**Umbrella**  
Whittall Street Clinic Whittall Street  
Birmingham  
B4 6DH  
Telephone: **0121 237 5700**

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